DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 399 CG 016 531

AUTHOR Reinharz, Shulamit
TITLE The Future of Feminist Psychology.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (90th, Washington, DC, August 23-27, 1982).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Style; Females; *Feminism; Interpersonal Relationship; Opinion Papers; Professional Recognition; *Psychology; *Research Methodology; *Research Problems; *Sex Bias; Sex Differences; Social Change; State of the Art Reviews

ABSTRACT

The future status of the field of the psychology of women can be examined by looking at the reasons for the existence of the field. Any field of exploration consists of three components, i.e., a set of scholars, a domain of inquiry, and a methodology. The scholars involved in the psychology of women form a group on the basis of both achieved and ascribed attitudes, and relationships built with one another. The domain of inquiry of the psychology of women is all phenomena relevant to women and girls, and a reevaluation of all other research in the framework of its relation to women and girls. Feminist psychologists are critical of psychological research on the issues of bias (it has been demonstrated that misogynist biases were present in supposedly objective measures or designs); limitation (in the definition of questions and problems); and oppression (much research has served to sustain a sex-stratified society). A field of inquiry reflects not only the social structure but the cognitive style of those who dominate in that social structure. To explore the question of cognitive style differences between men and women, a needed new direction for the psychology of women, requires learning to take risks and be imaginative. A model of research based on a feminine cognitive style represents a new paradigm for research. Encouraging diversity represents the values of the members of this field. By extension it would be valuable not to be limited to one research paradigm. (JAC)

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The Future of Feminist Psychology

Shulamit Reinharz

Brandeis University
Sociology Department

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CG 016531

Paper presented at the Symposium "The future of the psychology of women: separation, integration, elimination?" American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., August 1982.

Arnold Kahn and Paula Jean have asked me to discuss the future of the field of the psychology of women. My way of responding to this task is to examine the reasons for the current existence of the field. To my mind, there are three components of any field of exploration. They are 1) a set of scholars, 2) a domain of inquiry, and 3) a methodology. In the field of the psychology of women, each of these three elements has a special status which can be described briefly.

As in all other fields, the set of scholars in the psychology of women requires continued replenishment by new scholars, some of whom are beginning their careers, while others are expanding their lines of research from a different base. But unlike other fields, those involved in the psychology of women form a group both on the basis of achieved and ascribed attributes. Because we are both a society and a community, we have unclear boundaries: can a man belong, can every woman belong? These are unusual criteria with which to consider membership in a professional organization. In addition, we have a unique relation with a social movement which gave birth to, nurtures and needs us. Unlike many academic and clinical fields, we also have a natural audience for our work. Our very existence as a professional organization is a product of social change and furthers it. Thus, our field stands as a clear illustration of the indistinguishability of process and product in the academic sector.

In addition, our field rests to a large extent on the relationships we build with one another. We require and offer support to one another which means we both encourage each member to develop in her own way and demand excellence from one another. One of the reasons we seem to want to exist as

a group is precisely in order to engage in these particular interactive processes which both facilitate our professional work and clarify our personal lives. Participating in the network of psychology of women scholars also requires coming to grips with political issues such as our self-presentation vis-a-vis the APA, vis-a-vis our departments, and vis-a-vis the persons whom we study. Participating in this network also means rethinking our socialization and training. (Reinharz, 1979). Thus, although this field may appear analogous to other fields, I believe it is qualitatively different.

Next I will turn to the issues of the domain of inquiry and methodology. The domain of inquiry of the psychology of women is all phenomena which affect women and girls, plus the reinterpretation of all previous research with regard to its treatment or lack of treatment of phenomena relevant to women and girls. In other words, our domain of inquiry is two things: all phenomena relating to women and girls and a reevaluation of all other research in the framework of its relation to women and girls. This definition of the domain of inquiry of the psychology of women implies that this field is particularly reflective. Its reflective stance is guided by an interpretive framework that combines feminist ideology, feminist theory (derived from women's studies), and social science research. This characteristic of rethinking previous research in the light of an ideological, theoretical, and research-based framework reflects the critical stance feminist psychologists have vis-a-vis the rest of the discipline. The range of degree of criticism among feminist scholars, however, is wide. There are those who are almost acritical of psychology and those who almost reject that which could be defined as mainstream.

On what grounds are feminist psychologists critical of psychological research? The three major grounds are what I call issues of bias, limitation,

and oppression. First, bias. Through an examination of previous research in the new light of feminist concerns, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that misogynist biases were present in what the researcher believed to be objective measures or designs. This is the well-known problem of the contamination of research by value bias, a weakness which no psychologist or social scientist wants to be accused of. Its clear demonstration, however, has led to some reform in the direction of the reduction of sexist research. However, the reduction of sexist research in the direction of nonsexist research, is not the same as the encouragement of feminist research.

The second problem which has been identified through a re-examination of previous research in the light of the feminist framework is the problem of limitation, which suggests that the domain of inquiry of psychology has not only been biased but limited in its definition of questions and problems. It has insufficiently studied girls and women, it has limited the range of topics, it has ignored issues of concern to women, and has not explained our personal experience. When we think about how we live our days or our lives, we question how much we understand about our experience on the basis of such research. In this respect the psychology of women as a field has been very productive. It has defined new problems and new topics of inquiry that do not deny our personal experience. Generally, we have been socialized to formulate our research problems on the basis of issues that have arisen in previous research. We do not have much training in defining topics of inquiry that come from our personal experience.

The third issue, oppression, refers to the fact that re-examination of previous research through feminist consciousness has revealed that research has not only been unobjective but has actually contributed to discrimination

against women and girls. Research re-examined from a feminist consciousness demonstrates that research is imbedded in and sustains a sex-stratified society. The fact that feminist psychologists have been asking questions about the relation of research to society demonstrates that they have adopted a sociology of knowledge perspective which treats a field of science as itself a dependent variable. The desire to engage in such studies is another hallmark of this field.

The more radical extension of this idea is that a field of inquiry reflects not only the social structure but the cognitive style of those who dominate in that social structure. This reasoning leads some of us to ask whether or not contemporary disciplines generally reflect a male cognitive style which suppresses the full expression and development of women and their cognitive style. To engage this question requires an exploration of the differences between men and women with regard to male and female cognitive styles. Among us there is not much agreement as to whether there are any major differences between men and women. It is impossible to reach consensus on the interpretation of studies which demonstrate or fail to demonstrate differences until there is consensus on methodology. However, if there are differences in cognitive style, these could be reflected in differences in methodology. Interestingly there is widespread acceptance among us that there are differences between men and women as class members, the question is whether there are differences on the individual level other than those defined by anatomy and physiology.

Many of us have come to accept the critiques of bias and limitation. On the basis of our re-examination of research in their light we have

developed a constructive criticism of psychology which has been converted into guidelines for nonsexist research which are being adopted by professional organizations. But there is less consensus about the third issue, i.e. the extent to which research produced in a given society contributes to its furtherance or reproduction and whether the dominant form of conducting research reflects a male cognitive style. The remaining segment of this paper deals with that controversial issue.

To explore the question of cognitive style differences between men and women requires two skills which are not stressed in our training partly because we have not had control of our own training programs. Those two skills are learning to take risks and learning to be imaginative. An example of risk-taking is the presentation of ideas which challenge the prevailing view that scientific reasoning is unrelated to gender issues. My own teachers have argued strongly against the development of a feminist methodology but in so doing have acknowledged the existence and perhaps the importance of the controversy. For example,

> Much recent scholarship about women has made a significant contribution in bringing to light the selective and unrecognized perspectives of some accepted scholarly positions. Because I expect all scholarship to aspire to this ideal, I am made uneasy by any reference to a feminist logic or feminist methodology. Now I grant you that canons for acceptable evidence vary from soft to hard proof but these variations have nothing to do with feminism. It is not the case that research issues of significance to us as women require some special logic or qualitative rather than quantitative methodology. My own preference for qualitative methods reflects as much my own deficiencies as my strengths

(Komarovsky, 1982, p. 10).

Engaging in discussion about a distinctive feminine cognitive orientation implies risk-taking because it is likely to lead to rejection by critics in the mainstream. But consideration of such issues also requires imagination. It is very difficult for us, I include myself in this, to even imagine what Adrienne Rich calls a woman-centered university. (1979). It is hard to create an image of what it would consist of. Just as it is difficult to envision a non-sexist society, so too we find ourselves asking what would a feminist methodology look like? Do we have any models? Our thinking about this question is also hampered by the problem Evelyn Fox Keller (1980) has identified, i.e. that our models for distinctively female attributes reflect the way the patriarchal culture has defined what the female cognitive style is. We need imagination to free ourselves from this trap. In addition to scientific sources, ideas to guide our imagination can be derived from women's creative literary products, feminist science fiction or feminist literature about utopian societies.

Until we have developed a full model, I'd like to just mention that scholars such as Sara Ruddick (1980) who are trying to discover what the elements of a feminist cognitive style are suggest that they are different from a masculine cognitive style. The latter is characterized by an excessive emphasis on subject-object differentiation, on reductionism, on researcher-controlled situations, and on context-stripping methods. In contrast, a feminist cognitive style has been defined as being more collaborative, using notions of sisterhood in the research process itself, not using a hierarchical research organization, not being a controlling party of the research process but being subject to it, using one's own experience and

intuition as an explicit source of ideas, and using a cognitive orientation which is receptive, empathic, context-conscious, and simply put, draws on qualitative and phenomenological research, much of which was developed without any mention of its special relation with women.

Interestingly, however, the overwhelming percentage of feminist scholars do adhere to conventional methods. Golden's (1981) review of methods used in journals concerned with the psychology of women suggests that there is little publication of nonconventional formats there. Most feminist psychologists and sociologists use the dominant methods such as the experiment for psychology and the survey for sociology. But interestingly, in general assessments of the field of the psychology of women there is usually much praise for theory developed by people such as Jean Baker Miller (1976) and Nancy Chodorow (1978), whose methods diverge from the mainstream. Perhaps there is acceptance of a female cognitive orientation for theory building whereas this orientation might not be acceptable yet for smaller scale research.

A model of research based on a feminine cognitive style represents a new paradigm for research. For the psychology of women as a field to identify with this orientation is to invite a strained relation between those involved in the psychology of women and those involved in psychology generally. This strain makes the status of the psychology of women vulnerable in the sense of being unlikely to acquire resources needed to hire faculty or fund researchers. For that reason and others it would seem to be important that within the field of the psychology of women there be an encouragement of diversity. Encouraging diversity overlaps with the value expressed by members of this field - the acceptance of

pluralism. By extension it would be valuable not to be limited to one research paradigm. Only through diversity among us will we have a dialectic process to further the creativity of differing orientations. In addition, diversity offers a safer political strategy for gaining adherents and answering external critics. Diversity does mean, however, that we will need to encourage each other to develop further the positions we hold, from those who adopt the dominant research paradigm, to those interested in developing further a feminist cognitive model.

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